

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 BANGKO 12309 01 OF 02 280816Z
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 12309

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, TH
SUBJECT: KRIANGSAK SIX MONTH ROUNDUP

REF: (A) STATE 103134 (B) BANGKOK 11275

SUMMARY: DEVELOPING POLITICAL SITUATION IN THAILAND (DISCUSSED IN REF B) AFFECTS U.S. INTERESTS IN THAILAND AND IN THE REGION ONLY marginally. PROBLEMS FACED BY PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK ARE IN PART STRUCTURAL DIFFICULTIES THAT WOULD FACE ANY THAI GOVERNMENT AND IN PART ARE RESULT OF HIS LACK OF A STRONG POLITICAL BASE. KRIANGSAK AND HIS COOABORATORS ARE WELL-DISPOSED TO U.S. AND WANT GOOD RELATIONS WITH U.S., BUT THIS DISPOSITION IS NOT ALWAYS ADVANTAGEOUS TO HIM. GIVEN UNCERTAINTIES OF THAI ELECTORAL PROCESS, WE CANNOT STATE WITH CERTAINTY THAT KRIANGSAK WILL BE PRIME MINISTER A YEAR FROM NOW, ALTHOUGH HE BENEFITS FROM HOLDING OFFICE, THE MEDIA ARE GENERALLY WELL-DISPOSED TOWARDS HIM AND HE ENJOYS CONSIDERABLE SYMPATHY THROUGHOUT THE THAI ELITE. END SUMMARY.

1. EMBASSY APPRECIATES DEPARTMENT'S COMMENTS (REF A) ON OUR TEL ON THE FIRST SIX MONTHS OF THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT (REF B). OUR VIEW OF THE PRESENT POLITICAL SITUATION IN THAILAND IS THAT U.S. INTERESTS IN THIS COUNTRY AND IN THE REGION ARE LIKELY TO BE AFFECTED ONLY marginally BY

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PAGE 02 BANGKO 12309 01 OF 02 280816Z

PROSPECTIVE DEVELOPMENTS.

2. IN OUR RE-DRAFT OF THE GUIDELINES FOR POLICY TOWARD THAILAND WHICH WE POUCH TO EA/TIMBS SEPT 16, 1977, WE DEFINED U.S. INTERESTS IN THAILAND AS FOLLOWS:
(A) CONTINUING CLOSE RELATIONS AND SUPPORT FOR A STRATEGICALLY IMPORTANT, PRO-U.S. COUNTRY WHOSE FUTURE

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC EVOLUTION WILL BE CRUCIAL TO THE PROSPECTS OF ASEAN AND TO THE NATURE OF THE LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ASEAN AND INDOCHINA STATES.

(B) COOPERATION IN EFFORTS TO REDUCE INTERNATIONAL TRAFFIC ON NARCOTICS FROM THAILAND AND BURMA TO THE U.S. AND WESTERN EUROPE.

(C) PROMOTING U.S. GLOBAL POLICIES (E.G., HUMAN RIGHTS, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT) AND ECONOMIC AND SECURITY INTERESTS, BOTH BILATERALLY AND WITH ASEAN.

(D) EXPANDING U.S. TRADE AND INVESTMENT IN THAILAND.

(E) PROVIDING RELIEF FOR REFUGEES FLEEING INDOCHINA, WHOM THAILAND ACCEPTS AND ASSISTS IN LARGE NUMBERS.

(F) RECEIVING FROM THE THAI SENSITIVE INTELLIGENCE INFORMATION COLLECTED AGAINST TARGETS OF HIGH PRIORITY FOR THE U.S. WE ASSUME THAT THE DEPT STILL CONSIDERS THE ABOVE LIST OF U.S. INTERESTS TO BE CURRENTLY VALID.

3. THE CONCLUSIONS OF REF B POINTED TO THE GROWING PROBLEMS BEING CONFRONTED BY THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT AND NOTED THAT IT WAS NOT RPT NOT CLEAR WHETHER OR HOW KRIANGSAK WILL MANAGE CONTINUING IN OFFICE S PRIM MINISTER A YEAR FROM NOW. IN PRESENTING THIS ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION WE NOTED THE PROBLEMS FACING HIM, BOTH POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC, AND HIS CONTINUED LACK OF A POLITICAL BASE-- A POTENTIALLY CRITICAL SHORTCOMING, PARTICULARLY AFTER HE RETIRES FROM THE THAI MILITARY SERVICE AT THE END OF

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 BANGKO 12309 01 OF 02 280816Z

SEPTEMBER. IN THIS STRUCTURALLY WEAK POSITION KRIANGSAK HAS BEGUN TO ENCOUNTER THE KIND OF COMPLEX POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ISSUES WHICH HAVE UNSEATED NUMEROUS THAI GOVERNMENTS OVER THE PAST HALF CENTURY OR SO. IN DEALING WITH THEM HE HAS THE ADVANTAGES OF OFFICE, OF THAI MEDIA GENERALLY WELL-DISPOSED TO HIM, AND OF A CONSIDERABLE SYMPATHY FOR HIM PERSONALLY THROUGHOUT THE THAI ELITE. THESE ADVANTAGES HAVE NOT BEEN EASY TO TRANSLATE INTO SUPPORT FOR ACTION BY THE THAI GOVERNMENT.

4. THE PRINCIPAL PROBLEMS CURRENTLY BEING FACED BY THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT (ESPECIALLY, HOW TO ORGANIZE THE ELECTIONS, HOW FAR TO OPEN UP THE POLITICAL SYSTEM, HOW TO COPE WITH INFLATION, HOW TO IMPROVE THAILAND'S TRADING POSITION, HOW TO CONTROL THAILAND'S RELATIONS WITH ITS COMMUNIST NEIGHBORS) AND PROBLEMS WHICH WOULD FACE ANY THAI GOVERNMENT. GIVEN THE CONSERVATIVE NATURE OF VIRTUALLY ALL THAI POLITICAL GROUPINGS (WITH THE SINGLE EXCEPTION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THAILAND), ANY THAI GOVERNMENT WOULD SEEK TO FOLLOW POLICIES ESSENTIALLY SIMILAR TO THOSE OF THE PRESENT CABINET, ALTHOUGH THERE COULD BE DIFFERENCES OF NUANCE.

5. IN TERMS OF U.S. INTERESTS IN THAILAND, PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK AND HIS CLOSEST COLLABORATORS ARE WELL-DISPOSED TO THE UNITED STATES, DESIRE TO CONTINUE CLOSE AND CORDIAL RELATIONS WITH US, AND ARE PREPARED TO GIVE OUR INTERESTS CAREFUL CONSIDERATION. THIS DISPOSITION, WHILE AGREEABLE TO US, IS NOT ALWAYS ADVANTAGEOUS TO KRIANGSAK AND IN SOME AREAS MAY BE DAMAGING HIM. FOR EXAMPLE, KRIANGSAK IS UNDOUBTEDLY MUCH MORE LIBERAL THAN MOST SENIOR THAI OFFICIALS CONCERNED WITH THE PROBLEMS POSED BY INDOCHINESE REFUGEES SEEKING ASYLUM IN THAILAND. MANY SENIOR THAI OFFICIALS, BOTH MILITARY AND CIVILIAN, SEE IN THE REFUGEES AN UNENDING ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN, A POTENTIAL THREAT TO THAI SECURITY, AND AN EMBARRASSMENT
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SECRET

PAGE 04 BANGKO 12309 01 OF 02 280816Z

TO THAI EFFORTS TO IMPROVE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH THE COMMUNIST COUNTRIES OF INDO-CHINA. PRESSURES WITHIN THE THAI GOVERNMENT OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS COULD BRING KRIANGSAK TO A POINT WHERE HE WOULD FIND IT NECESSARY TO DISPLAY A LESS RECEPTIVE ATTITUDE TO INDOCHINESE REFUGEES. ANOTHER THAI GOVERNMENT WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY BE LESS HELPFUL REGARDING THE REFUGEES.

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 12309 02 OF 02 280828Z
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S E C R E T SECTION 02 OF 02 BANGKOK 12309

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6. IN THE FIELD OF NARCOTICS KRIANGSAK HAS PUBLICLY EXPRESSED THE STRONG COMMITMENT TO THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE ILLICIT NARCOTICS TRAFFIC WHICH PRIME MINISTER THANIN HAD

PREVIOUSLY VOICED. HOWEVER, ALTHOUGH THE THAI POLICE CONTINUE TO PUT IN A RELATIVELY GOOD PERFORMANCE IN TERMS OF SEIZURES OF NARCOTICS, KRIANGSAK HAS BEEN UNABLE SO FAR TO APPOINT A PERMANENT SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE KEY COORDINATING AGENCY, THE NARCOTICS CONTROL BOARD, AND HIS APPOINTMENTS TO THE NARCOTICS UNIT OF THE THAI NATIONAL POLICE HAVE NOT SO FAR INSPIRED CONFIDENCE. THESE PERSONNEL PROBLEMS MAY BE ONLY A PASSING PHASE AND THAI PERFORMANCE IN THE NARCOTICS FIELD MAY NOT DETERIORATE SIGNIFICANTLY. HOWEVER, AN IMPROVED THAI PERFORMANCE ON NARCOTICS WILL REQUIRE A BETTER PERFORMANCE IN PICKING PERSONNEL.

7. AS PART OF A LONG-TERM TREND TOWARDS TAKING A DISTANCE FROM THE UNITED STATES ON GLOBAL ISSUES (SUCH AS HUMAN RIGHTS AND UN QUESTIONS) THE THAI GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN LESS RECEPTIVE TO U.S. REPRESENTATIONS OVER THE PAST TWO OR THREE YEARS THAN DURING PREVIOUS PERIODS. FACED WITH THE RANGE OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ISSUES PRESENTLY CONFRONTING IT, THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT PROBABLY WILL NOT IN FACT BE MORE RECEPTIVE TO OUR REPRESENTATIONS THAN IN THE PAST, ALTHOUGH KRIANGSAK IS CLEARLY SENSITIVE TO THAILAND'S HUMAN RIGHTS IMAGE.

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PAGE 02 BANGKO 12309 02 OF 02 280828Z

8. THAILAND IS AND HAS BEEN COMMITTED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ASEAN SINCE THE ORGANIZATION WAS FORMED IN 1967, AND IT IS LIKELY THAT KRIANGSAK WILL CONTINUE TO PAY CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION TO THIS REGIONAL BODY. SIMILARLY, KRIANGSAK WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE TO SEEK TO DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN AS CORDIAL A RELATIONSHIP AS POSSIBLE WITH THE COMMUNIST STATES OF INDO-CHINA. HOWEVER, A CONTINUATION OF BORDER TENSION WITH CAMBODIA OR ADDED STRAINS WITH LAOS AND VIET-NAM WILL LEAD TO GROWING QUESTIONS WITHIN THAILAND AS TO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF KRIANGSAK'S POLICIES OF NORMALIZATION WITH INDOCHINESE COUNTRIES. THIS COULD DAMAGE HIS POLITICAL PROSPECTS IN SIGNIFICANT MEASURE.

9. PRECEDING THAI GOVERNMENTS, LIKE THAT OF PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK, HAVE GIVEN LIP SERVICE TO THE CONCEPT OF EXPANDING U.S. TRADE AND INVESTMENT. SOMEHOW, THE OBSTACLES TO RAPID EXPANSION OF U.S. TRADE AND INVESTMENT HAVE NEVER BEEN FULLY REMOVED, AND THE PRESENT SITUATION IS NO DIFFERENT FROM THE PAST IN THIS RESPECT. HOWEVER, DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATURAL GAS RESOURCES IN THE GULF OF SIAM COULD WELL LEAD TO INITIATION OF OTHER MAJOR PROJECTS. I.E., THE SODA ASH PLANT IN THE NORTHEAST, THE DEEP WATER PORT SOUTHEAST OF BANGKOK, ETC., WHICH COULD PROVIDE THE INCENTIVE TO PROMOTE FOREIGN TRADE AND INVESTMENT. INDEED, WE BELIEVE THE FUTURE COURSE OF U.S.-

THAI RELATIONS WILL INVOLVE COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL INTERESTS TO A GROWING EXTENT, RATHER THAN MILITARY AND POLITICAL INTERESTS.

10. FOLLOWING FRIANGSAK'S RECENT SWING THROUGH SOUTHEAST ASIA, WE HAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT THE ASEAN STATES FEEL THAT KRIANGSAK IS A CONSIDERABLE IMPROVEMENT OVER HIS SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 BANGKO 12309 02 OF 02 280828Z

PREDECESSOR. HOWEVER, THE ASEAN COUNTRIES HAVE PROBABLY COME TO BE RESIGNED TO RELATIVELY FREQUENT CHANGES IN THE RTG, REALIZING THAT THAILAND IS A CONSERVATIVE COUNTRY WHERE RADICAL CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT IS RATHER UNLIKELY. CERTAINLY, THAILAND'S ASEAN PARTNERS HAVE ADJUSTED GRACEFULLY TO THE SEVEN THAI CABINETTS THAT HAVE HELD OFFICE SINCE THE FORMATION OF ASEAN IN 1967. CHINA HAS ADJUSTED AS BEST IT COULD TO FOUR THAI GOVERNMENTS SINCE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WERE ESTABLISHED IN OCT, 1975. RELATIONS BETWEEN THAILAND AND THE COMMUNIST STATES OF INDO-CHINA HAVE BEEN UNEASY, AT BEST, SINCE THE FALL OF SAIGON AND PHNOM PENH. RELATIONS CURRENTLY ARE BETTER THAN AT ANY TIME IN THE PAST THREE YEARS, BUT DETERIORATION COULD OCCUR ON SHORT NOTICE. THAI RELATIONS WITH BURMA HAVE NEVER BEEN CLOSE AND CORDIAL, BUT THERE HAS BEEN SOME IMPROVEMENT UNDER THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT. KRIANGSAK IS PERSONALLY COMMITTED TO STRENGTHENING TIES BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

11. IN PRESENTING OUR ANALYSIS OF THE FIRST SIX MONTHS OF THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT IN REFTEL WE DID NOT REPORT NOT SEEK TO SUGGEST THAT KRIANGSAK WILL NOT LAST MUCH LONGER AS PRIME MINISTER. RATHER, WE SOUGHT TO PRESENT A BALANCED PICTURE OF THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND THE EMERGING PROBLEM AREAS. GIVEN THE UNCERTAINTIES OF THE THAI ELECTORAL PROCESS, WE CANNOT STATE WITH CERTAINTY THAT HE WILL STILL BE PRIME MINISTER A YEAR FROM NOW. KRIANGSAK'S GROWING POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS COULD HAVE SOME IMPACT ON U.S. INTERESTS IN THAILAND AND THE AREAS, AS WE HAVE NOTED ABOVE, BUT THE PRINCIPAL INTERESTS OF THE U.S. IN THAILAND WOULD PROBABLY BE AFFECTED ONLY marginally. EVEN IN THE EVENT OF A REPLACEMENT OF THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT IN THE NEXT YEAR OR SO, PERHAPS AS A RESULT OF THE ELECTIONS OR INTERNAL MANEUVERING WITHIN THE THAI MILITARY, U.S. INTERESTS WOULD PROBABLY NOT BE SERIOUSLY AFFECTED BY SUCH AN OUTCOME, ALTHOUGH FREQUENT CHANGES OF GOVERNMENT ERODE THE THAI POLITICAL IMAGE AND SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 BANGKO 12309 02 OF 02 280828Z

GOVERNMENTAL PERFORMANCE.
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